



H. Ross Pywell III

July 28, 1944 - January 18, 2019

Howard Ross Pywell III, age 74, known to family and friends as Ross, passed away at Poudre Valley University of Colorado hospital in Fort Collins, Colorado, on January 18, 2019, in the company of his best friend, companion, and love for life, his wife Jan, and dedicated staff of the hospital after an uncomplaining 3½-year battle with cancer. He is now at home with his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Ross was born on July 28, 1944, in Boston, Massachusetts, to Howard Ross Pywell Jr. and Louise Olga (Galley) Pywell. He graduated from Canton High School and earned a B.S. in Forestry at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, in 1967. He was inducted into the Forestry Honorary, Xi Sigma Pi.

During the Vietnam War, Ross served as gunner's mate on the USS Mullinnix in the Gulf of Tonkin and the Mediterranean Sea. His proudest moment in the Navy was the night his crew hand-carried star shells all through the night from the depths of the ship's magazine to the on-deck guns in order to light the beach for medics operating on the beach.

Returning to Amherst after military service, Ross completed his M.S. and Ph.D. in Forestry, focusing on Forest Hydrology and Land Use Planning. His dissertation, "Current Study of Historical Land Use Change of Quabbin Area 1952-1972," provided a foundation for decision makers in watershed management for decades.

After seasonal work with the Forest Service, in 1975 Ross began work as a permanent Federal government employee with the USDA Forest Service, serving on the Nez Perce National Forest Planning Team in Grangeville, Idaho. He moved to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as Senior Mapping Specialist for the newly created National Wetlands Mapping Inventory in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1976. He transferred to the Washington, D.C., headquarters of the Inventory in 1978 serving as a biologist.

Returning to his roots, Ross was appointed State Extension Forester at the University of Massachusetts in 1980. In 1981, he moved to Fort Collins, CO, to continue his work as a

Wetlands Biologist/Cartographer. Former colleagues corroborate Ross was a central figure in the creation of a national geo-referenced wetlands database which has become foundational to managing wetlands in the U.S. His graduate work at the University of Massachusetts on "Massachusetts Map Down," a state-wide land use mapping project using remote sensing and geographic information overlays, was seminal to the creation of the National Wetlands Mapping Inventory.

Using GIS (Geographic Information Systems) expertise he acquired at University of Massachusetts and further developed through his years with the Wetlands Mapping Inventory, Ross returned to the USDA Forest Service in 1991 to work on the Forest Health Technology Enterprise Team in Fort Collins. There he helped to develop systems, techniques, and tools for aerial surveying of forest health including insect and disease damage. His contribution to the development of a digital sketch mapping system led to work and assistance to various states in the US. He also traveled to Russia, Taiwan, and New Zealand to promote the system. He authored or co-authored over 40 papers and presented his findings at regional and national meetings throughout the U.S. In 1993 as program manager he received the Forest Service Chief's Award for Excellence in Technology Transfer presented at a special ceremony in Alexandria, Virginia. He retired in 2004 with over 30 years of Federal Service.

He married Janice Elaine (Rienstra) Schoo on June 27, 1999, and is survived by Jan. From previous marriages he is survived by sons Jeffrey Mark Pywell (wife Juliann, grandson John Michael Paris) of Newberry Park, CA, and Jonathan Robert Pywell (wife Jen) of Corvallis, OR. He also leaves behind his sister Karin (Pywell) Alexander (husband Mark) of Bloomfield, NY; brother Mark Robert Pywell (wife Shari) of Seattle, WA; and three nieces and nephews. In addition, he is survived by two step-sons, Nolan Bruce Schoo and Jordan Cameron Schoo, both of Idaho, a step-daughter-in law and four step-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his parents.

A Celebration of Life will be held at Bohlender Funeral Chapel at a later date.

Comments



“ I'm so sorry we lost Ross, he was an awesome cooperator back in the 'old' days when we were trying to get the Digital Aerial Sketch Mapping system working. He was always hands-on, cut to the chase, and supported all the wild ideas the surveyors were coming up with. He had a great team, and Charlie and Lowell were instrumental in getting things to work. It is an honor to have known and worked with him.

Michael McWilliams - March 13, 2019 at 01:53 PM



“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



Michael McWilliams - March 13, 2019 at 01:45 PM



“ Jan and Family, I was very saddened to hear of Ross's passing. We worked together for several years while I was at the Remote Sensing Applications Center in Salt Lake City. Many people sharing here have stated his many fine qualities better than I can, but when I first met him, I was struck by his quick wit, his intelligence and his genuineness. He had great vision for what needed to be done to make a process work, and more importantly, what could be done. No flowery language, no bull, just straight to the point. Though he didn't suffer fools, he had a well of patience when it came to sharing his expertise and ideas. All qualities that I admire. I will miss him and keep him close in my memories.

Everett Alan Hinkley

Alan Hinkley - March 13, 2019 at 10:12 AM



“ Jan and Family:

I believe organizations take on the sum personality of individuals that make up an organization. This was particularly true of Forest Health Protection during the 90's.

"FHP" certainly lost part of its soul when Ross retired. Ross's no BS style, and inciteful approach to problem solving moved us very far. I remember many a well timed bark from the back corner of a meeting room or a whisper in the right ear that turned many a "group think" toward the right direction. We all listened to Ross, I will always remember those formative discussions fondly.

I very much owe Ross a debt of gratitude. Rob Mangold would have never hired this brash "State Guy" as the Director of FHTET unless Ross gave him the nod. The corner office I occupied for the last 15 years has been described as one of the "best" in the forest service. I know Ross had a lot to do with that, outmaneuvering most of the other USDA agencies in the last move by carving out the best real estate in building A.

Ross was a true leader, I've learned much from him,

Frank J. Sapio - March 13, 2019 at 09:28 AM



“ I don't think I've ever met anyone like Ross. Smart, quick, hilarious, as authentic as they come. I enjoyed my conversations with him so much, and can't believe I won't hear that distinctive voice again. I truly valued his wit, generosity, no bs advice, and how he was always true to his nature. I will miss him tremendously.

Gregg Thomas - February 11, 2019 at 12:00 PM



“ I was a contractor at FHTET and worked for Ross for about 15 years. I just read the current remembrances of others on Ross’ site and they reminded me of a few.

Tom Bobbe’s note uncovered a couple. I too remember how Ross was bundled up in rolls of US cash to get through airports and past the Russian Mafia. He joked that he looked like the Michelin man, but in fact he took his life in his hands on that trip promoting international forestry cooperation and later said that he would never do that again. I was also reminded of an Antonov flight where they could smell the plane’s leaking fuel, but Tom (is it possible it was Dick Myhre?) was awake, worrying about fuel capacities and miles to the home base while Ross was easily able to sleep through the return flight. His later explanation went something like...”It’s out of our hands now. If this is how we go, this is how we go.”

Ross and I didn’t always see eye-to-eye, but you never had to guess where you stood. During one of the early annual get-togethers with then-RSAC in Steamboat Springs, after dinner at a local restaurant and on the way back to the rooms, Ross spotted something. Bill White, first Director of FHTET, used to take his fishing boat whenever he travelled locally. Ross (not a big fan) saw the boat and exposed his true feelings (????) by pissing on Bill’s trailer hitch. Bill HAD to hook up that hitch when he left Steamboat! I’m assuming that Ross took some pleasure in that knowledge.

His sarcastic sense of humor was legendary. And when he laughed, it echoed throughout the office. The Steamboat story may be borderline, but there are other stories that shouldn’t see the light of day. Accordingly, since I won’t return until mid-July, if a contingent wants to gather at the Moot House for a ‘tall bourbon and coke’ or two in his honor and maybe share a few other stories, I’d love to join you. Here is my last picture of Ross, holding court at my 2010 retirement party with Frank Sapio and (I think) JD Mullen.

Rest in peace, Ross and heart-felt condolences to Jan and the rest of Ross’ family.



Lowell Lewis - January 29, 2019 at 02:11 PM



“ Dear Jan,

I'm deeply saddened to hear of Ross' passing. The last time I communicated with him was in 2010 when I was in Afghanistan. He advised me to stop sleeping through the air raids in my bunk and to "get my ass" to the shelter. Ross always had a great way with words.

I owe Ross so much. He funded my PhD research and served on my graduate committee. Without his support and friendship, I would not have had the great rewarding career that followed my work with Ross. I still remember one of the questions he asked me during my defense. My dissertation made a passing reference to Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Leave it to Ross to ask me to fully explain Einstein's theory during my defense. Hard love!

All my best to you and yours,

Dave Linden

David Linden - January 28, 2019 at 09:40 PM



“ In 1998 I was a new employee with RedCastle Resources/RSAC and keen to show all that I had the right stuff and hiring me wasn't a mistake. So my first project, they handed me all these pieces of equipment and said they all needed to synch up into an application (I will spare you the technical details). "Oh by the way, the project sponsor, this guy from Ft Collins named Ross Pywell is coming to check it out next month". His reputation as one who did not suffer fools preceded him. I was terrified. Apparently Ross saw something in what I did that somehow impressed him, and the project erupted into a nationwide effort, one that sent us on many training trips. I have many fond memories of those trips....crawling the jazz bars in New Orleans, flying in -14 F in Ely, MN, throwing equipment around the hangar in Salem, OR, gathering in Savannah GA and thumbing our noses at the surveyors who were staying at a flea bag motel outside of town while Ross got us a 4 star hotel right downtown. Ross always impressed me with his ability to read people and win them over with his charm - skills that made him an excellent Program Manager. And storyteller. We spent many hours driving to one place or another, waiting in airports, hanging out in a hotel bar watching the Red Sox, times when Ross would share a story of some previous adventure. I especially liked the ones detailing a trip to Russia with Tom Bobbe.....carrying around thousands of dollars in cash in a suitcase, etc.

Fast forward a few years and Ross had retired and they relocated to Bend OR where Jan took a position with the FS. Ross did some contract work for RedCastle so it was great working with him and having them in the community for a few short years.

Godspeed, Ross. I am forever grateful for the big door you opened up for me career wise, and treasure the many fond memories of our adventures and work together.

Love and sympathy to Jan and all other of Ross' family relations,

Charlie Schrader-Patton
Bend, OR.

Charlie Schrader-Patton - January 28, 2019 at 08:07 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Barry and Connee Russell - January 28, 2019 at 06:53 PM



“ Connee's birthday in Napa Valley, moons ago. Traveling with them alot of fun.

Barry and Connee Russell - January 28, 2019 at 06:56 PM



“ Dear Jan and family,

Sad to hear Ross has passed. Ross certainly had a way with words and it was always quite clear where he stood on all situations. Did not waste time sugar coating anything and always quick with a chuckle or retort if you happened to tickle his funny bone. When asked what he thought, you got a straight answer and he made no presumptions of what you wanted to hear. I always appreciated the fact that with Ross you could have a contentious conversation and it would end with "let's go have a beer". I had many years with Ross in MAG and then FHTET and will remember him with fondness and a little chuckle when I recall times that he set the record straight in a meeting or conversation.

With sympathy,
Lance David

Lance David - January 28, 2019 at 03:28 PM



“ I am so sad to hear of Ross's passing. I worked with Ross on various projects through the years while he was with the Forest Health Enterprise Team in Ft. Collins. Ross and I were some of the first Forest Service employees to develop cooperative projects with Russia. I still remember Ross carrying a money belt with over \$30K in it to ensure the funds made it to our cooperators. Shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union it was difficult to transfer funds to Russia since the corruption was so bad at the time. Certainly he was a walking target, people in Russia were pretty destitute at the time. Ross will be surely missed by all those that knew him. May he rest in peace. God Bless.

Steve Munson, FHP Group Leader, Intermountain Region (retired)

Steve Munson - January 28, 2019 at 11:42 AM



“ Today Jon and I had a tribute to Ross on the beach in Newport, Oregon where Ross and Jan lived for a few years. We are about an hour away in Corvallis. It was where I was able to get to know them both and we spent holidays there together. We would bring the dogs and they begged for cheese and ran on the beautiful beach. Ross was fond of them - especially D who sat on his lap and got infinite pets from him. We thought this would be an appropriate and special place to contemplate the life of Ross. It was a perfect day. We both wrote letters to him and gathered photos and other items that remind us of him. Jon bundled up the items and tied it all to a piece of tree bark he found on the beach and we let the sea take it away. It was a very helpful way to help us come to grips with this huge loss in our life.



jen pywell - January 27, 2019 at 11:00 PM



“ I worked with Ross on many projects tackling the visualization of forest health and harvesting issues. Ross was at the same time a huge skeptic and huge supporter of the work. As a result, most projects were a riot of merciless critique, endless told-you-sos and Ross' inimitable sarcasm...that inevitably blossomed into friendship. One memorable trip was more subdued. We arrived in the New Zealand winter both suffering from colds, congestion and relentless dripping noses. Luckily we found a rental car with a pre-fitted case of Kleenex and sneezed our way around the South Island. On arriving in the North and Rotorua neither of us could fully enjoy the sulphurous aromas of the spa pools. Fortunately we found some buckets of green-lipped mussels and enough red wine to put us on the path to recovery. Ross, you are much missed but the stories and memories live on. Peace.

brian orland

Brian Orland - January 27, 2019 at 07:06 PM



“ I had the pleasure of working with Ross on many Forest Service remote sensing, GIS and image processing projects. Ross was a very talented scientist and program manager.

During 1993 I was able to join Ross on a trip to Russia for a forest health aerial survey project. We worked with scientists from the Russian Academy of Sciences in Krasnoyarsk, central Siberia. Ross and I installed the Forest Service airborne video system (developed by Ross and his team) in several Russian military aircraft. We flew with our Russian colleagues over miles of wild Siberian Taiga forest land recording imagery of forest pest infestations.

The first aircraft we flew in was an Antonov 2. This was a 1950's vintage bush plane that looked its age. As Ross and I installed our equipment in the plane we watched the pilot fill the plane with gas. As soon as he was finished, a steady stream of cars drove up to our plane. The pilot began a lively barter business of exchanging gas drained from the engine bay for bottles of Vodka. It seemed like one bottle of Vodka bought one rubber bucket of gas. The next day as we took off for the first flights, Ross and I wondered if there was enough gas left in the tanks!

Later in the trip we flew in a modern Antonov 30. By contrast this was a well maintained and highly specialized aerial survey aircraft. The flight crew was very strict and professional, and they did not allow us to take any pictures of the airplane!

Through the years I was able to work with Ross on many other projects. I always enjoyed working with Ross. He had a sharp wit and keen sense on how to get things done.

-Tom Bobbe

Tom Bobbe - January 27, 2019 at 02:57 PM



“ Ross was a man who made my friend, Jan, very happy and content. For his love and kindness to her I shall always remember and treasure him and as a true gentleman.
Cher Cunningham

Cher Cunningham - January 25, 2019 at 08:26 PM



“ On behalf of Michael Baker International and the GeoLink SketchMapper team please accept my warmest condolences. I had the pleasure to first meet Ross in early 2000 as he spearheaded the partnership between FHTET and Michael Baker to develop custom software to support the Forest Service's aerial mapping needs. Nearly 20 years later and that software is still in use by the USFS, USFWS and various other state and international forestry agencies from Australia to Malaysia because of Ross's visionary ideas. - Aaron Morris

Aaron Morris - January 25, 2019 at 05:51 PM



“ 5 files added to the album Pics from Jen and Jon



JONATHAN PYWELL - January 24, 2019 at 11:40 PM



“ I had the pleasure of working with Ross when I was the Corps of Engineers liaison to the National Wetlands Inventory in St. Petersburg Florida. From the time that he arrived at the NWI it was clear that Ross was intelligent, competent, and professional. What took just slightly longer to observe was Ross’ wry, dry sense of humor. It soon permeated the place and brought smiles to all our faces. I remember one time I was in my office sorting through NWI t shirts we had ordered. I had them hanging in every possible place – on the door, file cabinets, chairs etc. according to people’s orders, sizes and colors. Ross poked his head through the door, and, in a kind of Groucho Marx manner said, “what, you’re opening a Chinese laundry?” Ross’ achievements have been impressively captured in his eulogy. I would just like to add that the Department of the Army recognized and appreciated the work that Ross spearheaded in digital mapping at the NWI.

Ross was a wonderful colleague to work with and will be sorely missed by everyone who knew him.

I will never forget his humor. I’m sure he didn’t leave it behind. If, on some quiet, peaceful nights, you hear laughter cascading from the heavens, you will know that Ross’ humor lives on.

Rudy Nyc

US Army Corps of Engineers, Retired

Rudy Nye - January 24, 2019 at 03:23 PM



“ Ross worked for me for a few great years when I was Director of FHP in the 2000s. He was clever and a real problem solver. When a situation came up that was complex he figured it out and spared me the part I didn't need to know about either because it was not in the manual or he knew I would never understand. Loved Tom Bobbie's account of the Russia trip. Russia took awhile to recover from forest health delegations,,especially that one. Allan Bullard and Andy Mason, aka the Bobsey Twins spent most of their time making sure Ross was accounted for. I will miss Mr. COOL, Ross Pywell.

Rob Mangold - January 27, 2019 at 05:46 PM



“ Jan, so sorry for your loss. It’s been a few years since we met you and Ross at The Moot House. We enjoyed his company and good times together! Our prayers are with you and family.



John and Ann Helmut - January 23, 2019 at 08:10 PM



“ My father was a huge influence on me. His personality shaped mine in so many ways and so every day I get to think of him when I do the same little thanks as him. I love him and miss him something terrible. But I know he is no longer having to struggle and suffer through the treatments and the pain. He was a strong man who cared deeply about his family, his job and his wife Jan and he left the world a better place than he found. Thanks Dad. I love you.

jon - January 23, 2019 at 03:02 PM



“ The world has lost a good man who had a fun sense of humor. And we have lost a good friend. He will be missed.

Duane & Judy Asherin - January 23, 2019 at 01:07 PM



“ I have many memories of Ross. He was a long time friend of my parents. They had many good times together. Ross was one of a kind! I am sure he is having a good time catching up with my dad in heaven. Friends reunited.

Allison Schanaman - January 22, 2019 at 08:49 PM



“ Ross was an important player in the success of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wetlands Inventory (NWI). Lew Cowardin and Frank Golet were two of the authors of the Classification of Wetlands and Deepwater Habitats that is used by the NWI and became the national standard. They both attended the University of Massachusetts. I attended U. Mass. Ross also attended U. Mass. After Ross was hired, I was told that the National Wetlands Inventory was a national program and we shouldn't hire anyone else from the Northeast, especially not from U. Mass. The next person to join the National Wetlands Inventory was the USGS liaison Paul Brooks. He also attended U. Mass.
He will be fondly remembered by his friends and colleagues from U. Mass. and the National Wetlands Inventory. Bill Wilen

Bill Wilen - January 22, 2019 at 05:43 PM



“ Jan, Jeff and Jon, Julie and Jen, it is a sad path you are walking right now, but it is good that you have one another to walk with. We are glad that Ross has finally journeyed beyond the pain he bore so stoically. You all provided love, comfort and support in abundance. He was blessed to have you all with him in his final years. May he rest in peace. With love and sympathy,
Nancy & Luis Pi-Sunyer

Nancy A. Pi-Sunyer - January 22, 2019 at 10:26 AM